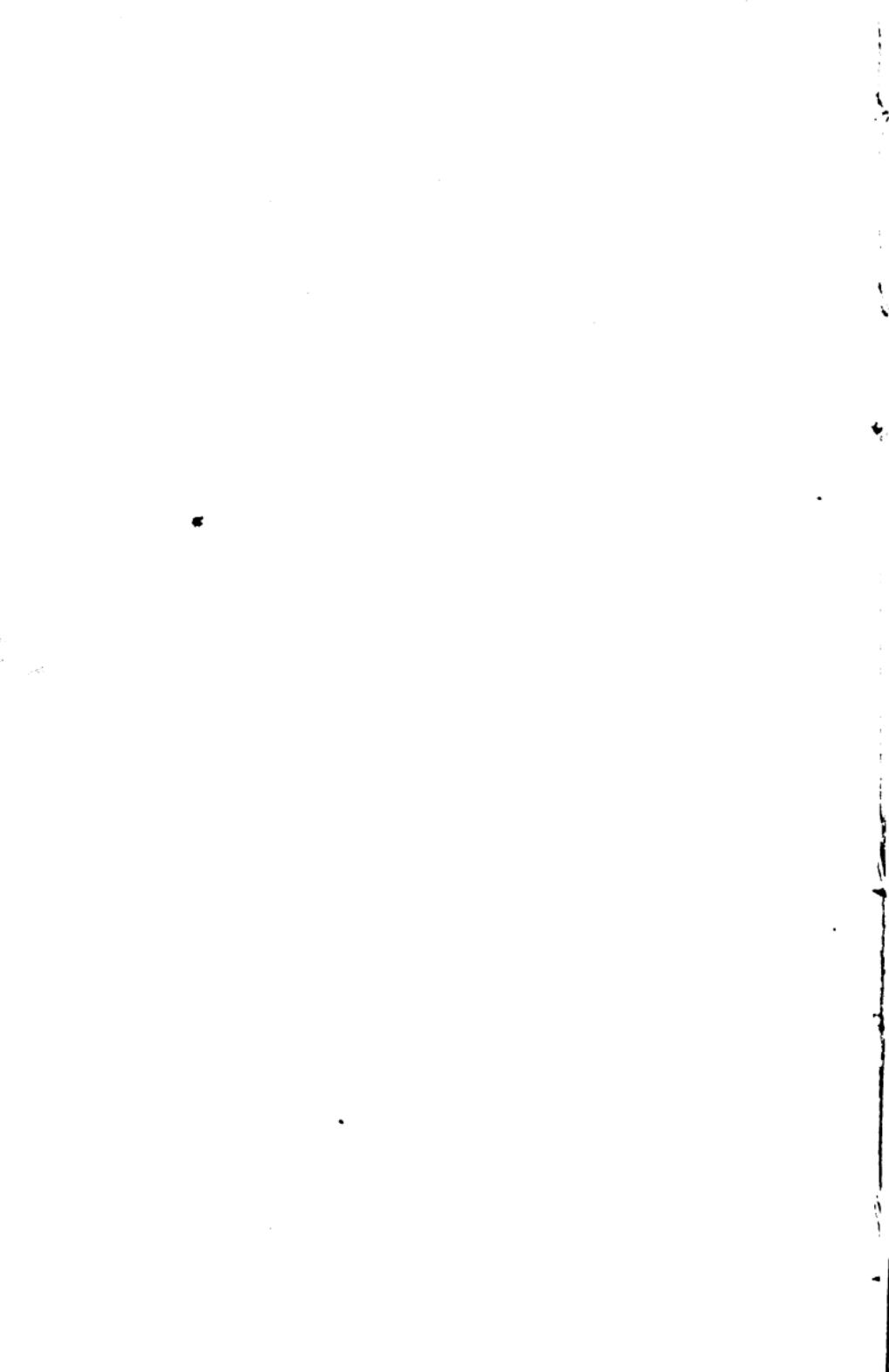


'THE MUSICAL PILGRIM'
Edited by Sir Arthur Somervell

**The Chamber Music of
Brahms**

by H. C. Colles





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General Editor *Sir Arthur Somervell*

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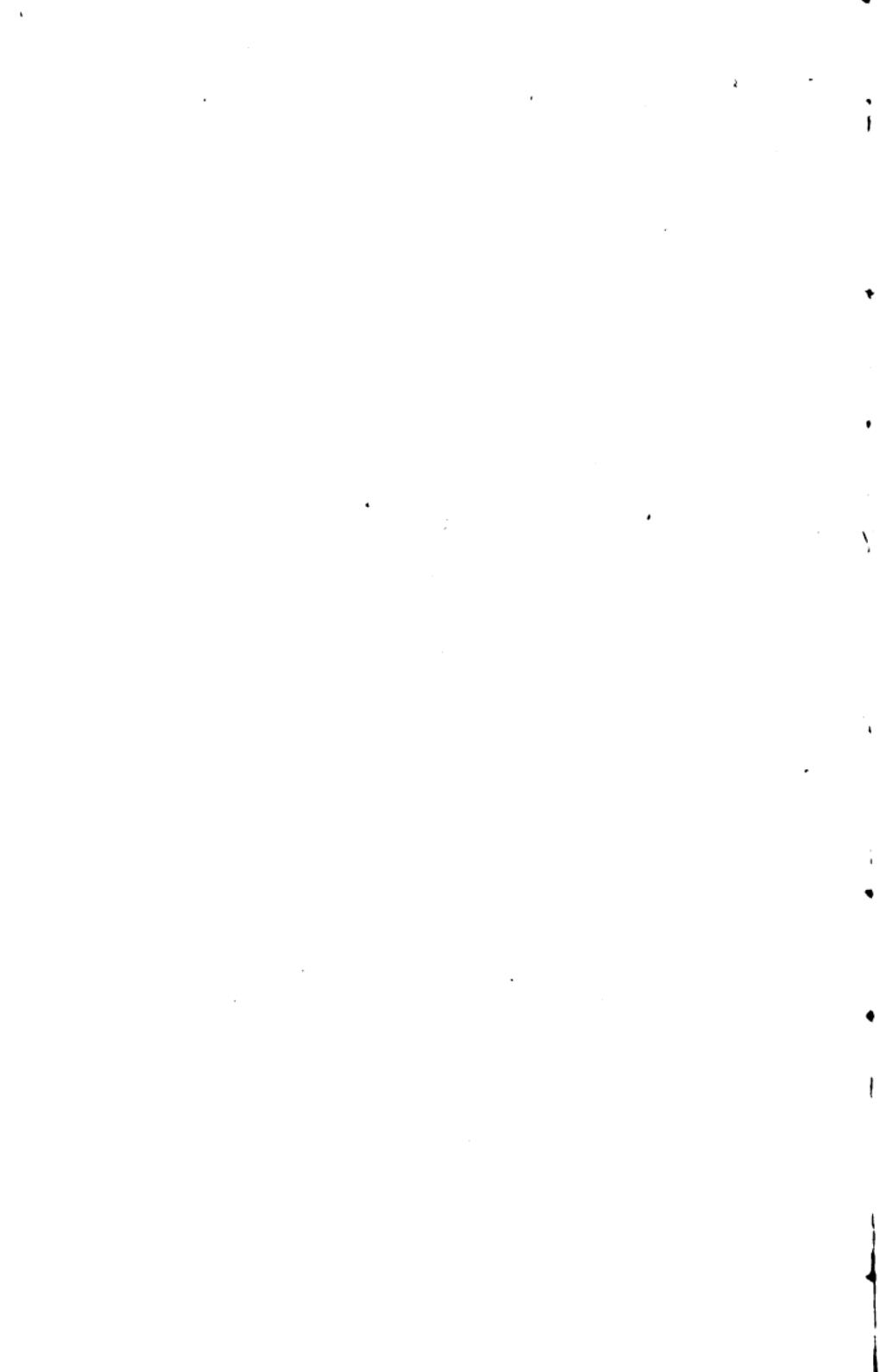
PREFACE

THESE notes on Brahms's Chamber Music were written for the complete series of performances given in eight Centenary Concerts (April 25 to May 6, 1933) at Wigmore Hall, London, by the Isolde Menges String Quartet and Mr. Harold Samuel, with the assistance of other artists. They have been subjected to some slight revision, and the musical quotations, which the concert programmes could not admit, have been added for this volume. Originally the notes were grouped according to the order of their performance at the several concerts and were actually written in that order. Here they follow the order of the opus numbers, which is more or less that of composition, and the change has seemed to require more attention to historical sequence. The first version of the Trio in B major (Op. 8) was not included in the concerts and what is said of it below is added to complete the survey.

As the notes were first intended merely as a commentary (not a full analysis) to suggest to the listener some points which otherwise might escape his attention, they are most likely to be useful to the student who reads them with the miniature scores before him. The musical quotations added, therefore, are not intended to be a thematic catalogue, but are given to emphasize a salient point in the discussion here and there.

H. C. COLLES.

May 1933.



THE CHAMBER MUSIC OF BRAHMS

IN the third quarter of the nineteenth century Johannes Brahms was not merely the greatest living composer of concerto chamber music—he was the only composer who was writing great music of the kind. The leaders of modern thought were entirely dominated by the theatre and the concert-room, and the latter meant primarily the orchestra, the vehicle of romanticism and the new music. Brahms fought shy of the orchestra. Comparatively late in his career he still had some difficulty in handling its technique. In his boyhood at Hamburg the piano was his constant companion; he first became known in musical Germany as a pianist playing his own works. As a composer he worked outwards from the piano, to combinations of other instruments with it, and to the string quartet which excluded it. He destroyed his early essays in quartet writing together with a Phantasie Trio in D minor (*Largo* and *Allegro*) for piano and strings, which Schumann had proposed should be published as his Opus 1, and sonatas for violin and piano which Joachim had suggested might be his Opus 5. An octet for strings and wind survives only in its re-written form as the Serenade in D for orchestra (Op. 11).

Actually the earliest specimen of Brahms's concerto chamber music now in existence, and therefore placed first in the discussion below, is the 'Sonaten-Satz' for piano and violin, Scherzo of the sonata in which Brahms collaborated with Schumann and Dietrich as a greeting to Joachim in 1853. The Trio for piano and strings in B major (Op. 8) was so drastically re-written in later years that the version commonly

performed now cannot be considered as a work of the young Brahms at all. The earlier version published in 1854 will receive brief description here. Apart from this the opus numbers accord closely with the chronology of composition, and the String Sextet in B flat, Opus 18, first performed by Joachim at Hanover in 1860, may be taken to be the starting-point of Brahms's career as the composer of chamber music, *par excellence*.

At about the same time as the Sextet, that is, when he was engaged in playing the classics of chamber music with the court musicians of Detmold, all the three Quartets for piano and strings were projected. The great pair in G minor and A major were Brahms's introduction to Vienna; the C minor for some reason or other tarried on its way and was not finished and performed until fifteen years after the Sextet. That is curious, because though Brahms was slow in the handling of each new medium, he was generally quick in the composition of subsequent works in it, and the combination of piano and strings was his most familiar medium in the early 'sixties.

A string Quintet (with two violoncelli) was composed between the two Sextets; but after a trial performance was withdrawn for further consideration, and ultimately became the Quintet for Piano and Strings (Op. 34). The group also contains the first Violoncello Sonata (Op. 38), and is completed by the unique Horn Trio (Op. 40).

Brahms once, alluding to his habit of following one achievement with a second of the same class, said that though he had never married he felt sure that if he had he would have married twice. But he never again wrote for the horn in chamber music, though his peculiar sympathy with that instrument is evidenced in every one of his orchestral works.

The two String Quartets published together as Opus 51 in 1873 begin a new era, though they are not really so widely separated from the group of the Sextets, the Quintet, and the Piano Quartets as their date of publication and performance suggests. Indeed, Mme Schumann mentions an occasion when Brahms played to her the C minor String Quartet together with parts of the *Deutsches Requiem* in 1866. But it is clear that after his boyish experiments he hesitated to commit himself to the texture of the four strings in which every note must be either inevitable or wrong. While he hesitated about the quartets, he had plunged into a whole series of massive works for voices with orchestra, the *Requiem*, *Rinaldo*, the *Alto Rhapsodie*, *Schicksalslied*, and *Triumphlied*. The Symphony in C minor was already germinating in his mind, and the third and last of the String Quartets (Op. 67 in B flat) was its companion, perhaps, as Professor Tovey suggests, thrown off as a recreation from more arduous tasks.

Schumann had been impatient to persuade Brahms to write for orchestra, and Brahms had resisted in order to concentrate on the more precise values which belong to the combinations of solo instruments in chamber music. When he did 'sink his magic wand' in the masses of orchestral and choral tone he did not leave it there. The Violin Sonata in G is the companion of the Violin Concerto; at the height of his symphonic period the Trio for Piano and Strings (Op. 87) in C and the Quintet for Strings in F (Op. 88) made their appearances together. Two more Violin Sonatas, the second Violoncello Sonata (Op. 99), the Trio for Piano and Strings in C minor (Op. 101), and the second String Quintet (Op. 111) in G, some of them the products of

his summer holidays on the lake of Thun and at Ischl, show him constantly reverting to the types of which he was the supreme master, and in which his thought moved most congenially. Indeed, the decade of the 'eighties, despite its richness in other branches of music, is almost as prolific in chamber music as is that of the 'sixties. At the end of it comes the re-writing of the Trio in B major.

The clarinet works, the Trio, Quintet, and two Sonatas, inspired by the playing of Richard Mühlfeld in the Meiningen Orchestra which had produced Brahms's Fourth Symphony, form a group by themselves, and are the epilogue to his instrumental music, as the motets and the 'Vier ernste Gesänge' are to his vocal music. They round off Brahms's singularly consistent career in a mood of reflection rising to serenity.

Sonatensatz. Op. posth.

Piano and Violin

Allegro

The score, published by the Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft in 1906, bears the date 'Düsseldorf, Okt, 1853'. That was the year of Brahms's introduction to the Schumann circle. Joachim was coming to pay a visit to the Schumanns at Düsseldorf, and Schumann summoned his pupil, Albert Dietrich, and his twenty-year-old protégé, Brahms, to join him in writing a sonata for the visitor. Dietrich wrote a first *Allegro* in A minor, Schumann an Intermezzo in F major, Brahms followed with his Scherzo in C minor, and Schumann finished the work with a Finale in A minor and major. Brahms's choice of a key, and the fact that he began his Scherzo

with a reiterated 'fiddle G', suggest that he had little thought about fitting in to the context. That does not matter now, since the context was never published, and probably the Scherzo never would have been if Brahms had regained possession of the manuscript. Its preservation is fortunate, not so much for intrinsic qualities, though the Scherzo is a virile piece of work, but because it affords a glimpse of the composer at a stage of which we have too little record.

The rhythm of the opening is one which haunts a great deal of Brahms's music, and its triplet always seems to suggest a fateful grip from which the melodic ideas strive to free themselves. Compare the Ballade, *Edward*, for piano (Op. 10, No. 1) and the drums in the *Schicksalslied*. That triplet, and the upward pressure of the semitone (marked $\overline{\overline{\overline{m}}}$) in such shapes as the following, generate the whole movement; they invade even the more lyrical Trio in G major, marked *più moderato*.

Ex. 1 (a)

Vln.

Pfte.

Brahms was essentially a diatonic composer, and it is largely because his style did not change in the direction

of chromaticism that he was regarded by his contemporaries as reactionary or at any rate as immobile. His most characteristic use of semitone progression is this of the diatonic semitone between the fifth and sixth degrees of the minor scale. It can be traced through much of his later work, particularly throughout the Quintet in F minor, Op. 34, in the first movement of the Violoncello Sonata in E minor and the third of Violoncello Sonata in F (see the notes on these works below).

Trio in B major, Op. 8

Piano, Violin, and Violoncello

*Allegro con brio (con moto).*¹ SCHERZO, *Allegro molto. Adagio (non troppo).*¹ *Allegro*

This Trio, in the form in which it usually appears to-day, is a composite portrait of the young musician who came to Schumann in the 'fifties with a portfolio of compositions, and the great man whose mastery of symphonic form was attested in the 'nineties by four symphonies and nearly all the chamber works which are the subject of this study. The original version was published by Breitkopf in 1854, and the revised version by Simrock in 1891. A critical comparison of the two has lately been made by Professor Tovey in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, and his illuminating dicta deserve the attention of students. With the exception of the Scherzo, the later version is practically a new work evolved by taking the initial themes of the first version and developing them in combination with new secondary ones. Thus in the progress of develop-

¹ In 1854 version.

ment the open countenance of youth becomes lined with the experience of age.

Since the Trio of 1854 is the first full-length work of concerted chamber music by Brahms that we now possess it will be worth while to consider it briefly in its own right, as it were, but since its score is not published in miniature reference as to the points of difference will be made to the score of 1891.

The suave opening tune on the violoncello is developed at leisure up to a considerable climax. The first sixty bars or so are the same in both versions save for minor details. But at the moment when the quaver movement seems on the point of developing to greater energy, there is a decline of tone and a slackening of rhythm in the earlier version to a point at which the piano alone introduces a new tune in octaves.

Ex. 2.



It has a melodic pendant which recalls the first subject.

Ex. 3.

pp dolce poco scherz.



All through this, the 'second subject' section, the texture is studiously thin, the tone restrained. But it is largely from this material that the vigorous middle section is developed. These gentle melodies combined

with quaver and dotted-note figures carry the listener far from the lyrical feeling of the initial theme. When at last that theme returns it has such freshness that the full recapitulation of it as it first appeared seems inevitable. The 'second subject' themes (Ex. 2 and 3) do not appear again in full, but a very elaborate coda loaded with such markings as *con forza*, *pesante*, *molto pesante*, works to a vehement cadence in the manner of the early piano sonatas.

Save for a coda the opposite of vehement, in which the strings recede into the distance, the Scherzo of 1854 was retained virtually intact in the later version (see below).

The slow movement starts with a solemn Choral-like theme to which presently a song melody on the piano (accompanied pizzicato on the strings) succeeds.

Ex. 4.



The Choral returns with its triplet variation in the piano part just as it does in the later version, but there follows an *Allegro (doppio movimento)*. This delightfully irrelevant escapade is pursued to the verge of a brilliant ending when, after the final tonic chord has actually been struck, a reflective coda insinuates the Choral theme again and the movement ends pianissimo.

The last movement is an adventure in key relationship. It is in B minor, and though a major ending to works in a minor key is a commonplace of the classical style, the reverse, if not unprecedented, is sufficiently rare to be noticeable. But more than that, though the movement ends as it began in B minor, its principal

theme is peculiarly chary of key definition, and from the first seems to waver in the direction of F sharp minor. In the first version this principal theme passes to a 'second subject' in F sharp major, a smooth melody announced by the violoncello of comparatively small importance in the scheme, and closely related to what has gone before it. As in the case of the first movement Brahms gets his final climax by a quickening of time, an obvious device outgrown later, and one which produces an ending of rather conventional brilliance.

Placing the two side by side the growth of Brahms's mastery through forty years of experience appears most decisively in the remodelled codas of the first movement, the Scherzo and the Finale. The self-consciousness of youth disappears, and in each case the endings of the later version become inevitable.

In the later version the handling of the frank *cantabile* melody which the piano and violoncello enunciate at the outset may be compared with the Quintet in F. In both cases one is inclined to wonder how so complete an idea can be made amenable to the processes of sonata form. Brahms presently allows more fragmentary ideas to break in on the smooth surface of melody, and at the point where in 1854 the energy slackened it is intensified now by the triplet quaver figures. When the process has proceeded far enough, a new theme of more introspective character introduced by the piano arrives as 'second subject' and carries the course of the exposition not to the expected dominant key but to the relative minor (G sharp). What follows on this situation is necessarily quite different from the original plan of the movement and in many ways differs from the customary plan of sonata form. Indeed, the

first melody never reappears in full. The two subjects are inseparably linked after their first meeting.

The Scherzo, with a theme a little like that of the Horn Trio cut down to a 4-bar phrase, remains a charming movement in the traditional form. The long chords on the strings, held while the piano elaborates the staccato motif of the principal theme, suggest wind instrument orchestration. The strings hold a single note (F sharp) through the 16-bar tune of the Trio, and though Brahms was far from wishing to keep all his instruments busy all the time, such a device may well have seemed to him a little naïve in later years. Though he did not alter it here it finds no parallel in his maturer compositions.

The Choral theme given out line by line on the piano (*pp* una corda) is the distinctive characteristic of what now becomes a ternary-form *Adagio*. When it returns after a more subtly woven middle section, its extensions both in figuration and key add a strange and ethereal beauty to the initial idea. This middle section is unmistakably the late Brahms of the type of the piano

Ex. 5.

Pfte. *p*

pp

intermezzi. It gives an introspective character to the whole movement which has lost something of its first resilience by the excision of the *Allegro*.

The last movement retains the adventure in key

relationship, but modifies it by the introduction of a broad second theme of an arpeggio structure in D major which brings a sense of greater directness into the music. This, ultimately reappearing in B major, links up the Finale with the mood, though not the matter, of the first movement. After the major episode, however, the coda returns to the minor key, and the rhythm of the principal theme, casting aside its tentative tonality, sums up the whole emphatically.

Sextet in B flat, Op. 18

Two Violins, Two Violas, Two Violoncello

Allegro ma non troppo. Andante ma moderato.
SCHERZO, Allegro molto. RONDO, Poco Allegretto
e grazioso

The Sextet originally began at what is now its eleventh bar; that is, the preliminary statement of the tune by the first violoncello was an afterthought added at Joachim's suggestion. Leaving it out of count, the principal theme of the first movement is a long-drawn melody of no less than 33 bars, involving a temporary modulation into D flat and coming ultimately to rest with a simple cadence in the principal key, B flat. This shows the repose of spirit which Brahms had gained since the days of the piano sonatas in which Schumann had called him the 'young eagle'. The whole Sextet, from this first movement in which every melody has the gentle contour of the *Ländler*, to the suave, unruffled rondo, has an easy command of the musical language rare in the work of a young man still well under thirty. The first movement has one big tonal climax at the height of development. This

justifies the richer scoring which brings the principal theme back again on a heightened plane of feeling, but anything like the dramatic fervour of the piano sonatas is completely ruled out.

The *Andante* is a set of six fine variations (the last in the nature of a coda) on a strongly defined theme in D minor. The binary shape of the theme allows each half to be repeated with richer scoring as though to impress it indelibly on the hearer's memory before the variations begin. As in the piano variations and those on a theme by Haydn, Brahms takes the phrase forms and their main harmonic progressions as the constant factors controlling the forms of the variations. The first two are figurations on these forms; the third is one of rushing scales on the two violoncelli; the fourth in the major evolves a new and beautiful melody, and in the fifth the violas become a hurdy-gurdy with a drone. The sixth reinstates the original melody.

The Scherzo and Trio is designed after the classical model and with something of the manner of Schubert although it is unmistakably Brahms. It provides an interlude of buoyant spirits before the first violoncello returns to sobriety with the calm rondo melody. Two details in that melody give rise to much of the later development, the four crotchets at the beginning and the little demisemiquaver ornament at the end. Between the two first statements of it there is a short interlude based on a rhythm of two crotchets and a minim which also attains an unexpected importance in the contrasting episodes. When the whole form has been expanded, a coda, *animato, poco a poco più*, takes this last rhythm in diminution to end the work almost in the manner of the sonata in its age of innocence.

Quartet in G minor, Op. 25

Piano, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello

Allegro. INTERMEZZO, Allegro ma non troppo. Andante con moto. RONDO ALLA ZINGARESE, Presto

The first of the piano quartets is pervaded by a sense of leisure, not like the Sextet due to the length of one principal theme, but by the way the varied thematic material of its first movement is assembled and set forth. The piano's opening phrase in legato crotchets is, as it were, accepted by the strings and then succeeded by a wholly different idea, in which again the piano is the leader, before the more expansive discussion of the opening crotchet theme begins. Similarly, though at the fiftieth bar the violoncello propounds a new melody it is a long time before that melody evolves into the rich and soaring one which must be described, though with singular inappropriateness, as the 'second subject'. Meantime, various subsidiary figures cluster

Ex. 6.

(a)



(b)

molto espress.

round the main ideas and help to accumulate a wealth of material which rivals the exuberance of Schubert's expositions. The difference between Brahms and

Schubert, however, is that Brahms shows no embarrassment in the task of developing his resources. The method is unconventional. There is no double-bar and repeat, but the long codetta in D major passes through a literal repetition of the first ten bars into an elaborate development of first subject ideas. Anything like a note-for-note recapitulation is avoided, and all the ideas accumulated at the outset grow by contact with one another through the whole length of the movement in a way baffling to the analyst, but completely convincing to the listener.

The two middle movements are equally unconventional. The delicate Intermezzo (C minor) is marked *Allegro*, but its drooping melody, set against a throbbing repeated note of accompaniment, seems set in a half-light, while the *Andante* with its broad tune in a major key (E flat) comes out into the open again and leads to a bold military march as its central episode. The customary contrast of scherzo and slow movement is not reproduced here, and how, after these two exquisite and original movements, any one can ever have thought that Brahms was in bondage to classical procedure passes understanding.

The Gypsy Rondo is the first occasion in which Brahms brought into his larger concerted works those rhythms of the Gypsy bands which had led him to the compilation of the *Hungarian Dances*. He handles them with extraordinary consistency and produces from them a finale of reckless gaiety and high spirits, scored so as to get the utmost brilliance from the contact of piano and strings.

Quartet in A major, Op. 26

Piano, Violin, Viola, Violoncello

Allegro non troppo. Poco Adagio. SCHERZO, Poco Allegro. FINALE, Allegro.

Brahms's pairs of works in one medium always present strong internal contrasts. The A major Piano Quartet is planned on more accustomed lines than its great companion, the one in G minor. The very titles of the several movements indicate this, and the sequence of keys (all are in A except the *Adagio* in E) bear it out. The movements, too, accord with the classical types; the first movement is in a strict and clearly articulated sonata form; the Scherzo has its Trio and its *da capo sin al fine*.

The first movement is almost as prolific in melodic shapes as is that in G minor, but the incisive rhythm of the first theme given out by the piano binds them more closely together. Its triplet quavers, contrasted at the outset with the violoncello's lyrical descending passage, are developed in an antiphonal way between piano and strings. This seems like a theme which somewhere later on will be brought back in a triumphant climax of simultaneous fortissimo by all instruments, but Brahms defeats this expectation, refusing so obvious a means of effect. The development rises to a strenuous and dramatic climax; but the tone recedes, and when the initial theme returns it is even more lightly scored for piano alone than it was at its first appearance.

The *Adagio* is Brahms in his most romantic mood. Indeed, the juxtaposition of so classical a design as the first movement and the romantic colour of the second must have added to the difficulties of those who wanted

to place the composer in one category or the other. The principal theme of the *Adagio* is curiously scored. The long cantabile melody is played by the piano, the strings,

Ex. 7.

Vln.

con sord.

Pfte.

p express. e dolce.

muted, wreathing their paired quavers around it. Not till its third appearance, when the strings take off their mutes, is the process reversed. Then the violin and violoncello play the tune two octaves apart, while the piano (*una corda*) takes up the paired quaver accompaniment. This tune, in fact, makes four more or less complete appearances with varied details of presentation. Between them are episodes in which the piano introduces sweeping and mysterious-sounding arpeggios (of a type peculiar to this movement), answered by mutterings of the paired quavers on the strings. A bolder and more passionate theme on the piano takes possession of

Ex. 8.

'Cello.

'Cello.

Pfte.

pp una corda.

the central section, and with this the persistent paired quavers are also combined.

There is no mystery about the Scherzo designed in a full sonata form, followed by a Trio in D minor of similar pattern. From its ringing bell-like beginning high up on the strings all is life and good spirits, a mood preserved in the more actively energetic Finale. This, though not labelled 'Rondo alla Zingarese' like the Finale of the G minor Quartet, is in a free rondo form, and has a principal theme, which might have been that of one of the *Hungarian Dances*, with its stamping syncopations. The episodes to which it leads, however, are not of the dance kind at all. Brahms digresses into his own more profound types of expression with the utmost freedom. He is not in the least concerned to preserve the dance rhythm style, but each time the dance measure returns and banishes reflection, till one is reminded of Johnson's friend who had tried to be a philosopher, but found 'cheerfulness always breaking in'. At last cheerfulness runs riot in the mad onrush of the coda.

Quintet in F minor, Op. 34

Piano, two Violins, Viola, Violoncello

Allegro non troppo. Andante, un poco Adagio.

SCHERZO, Allegro. FINALE, Poco Sostenuto—

Allegro non troppo

Brahms's only Quintet for piano and strings is a masterpiece of that period when his powers had been ripened by the experience of the first Sextet and the two Piano Quartets (Opp. 25 and 26). It is difficult to imagine that it can ever have been thought of, as we know that it was, for any other combination of instruments, so

constantly do the string group and the piano play into one another's hands. An instance occurs at the outset, where, after the long brooding arpeggio figure has been announced, the piano's sharp percussive tone, reducing the figure to one of semiquavers, stirs the movement to a greater activity. As in the contemporary piano quartets, there is a great wealth of thematic material, though there is never any doubt of the predominant importance of this initial idea. An *espressivo* is really

Ex. 9.



closely linked with the first idea. Notice the haunting D flat C, here, which pervades so much of the later movements. It involves modulation to a remote key (C sharp minor) in which a 'second subject' appears softly over a growling triplet figure in the bass of the piano. Long before its tributary themes have reached the codetta which ends the exposition, the semiquavers of the first subject have made a nervous reappearance in the piano part. They are banished from the intricate central development to return with increased force at the moment when recapitulation begins. A coda of great power is begun by an exquisite and ethereal passage for the strings, brushed away by these same pianistic arpeggios. Finally, the strings expand their theme with ever-widening intervals and the whole weight of their tone, till the movement comes to rest on a full and long-sustained chord.

The *Andante* in A flat is a gentle reverie bringing relief from the strenuous activity of the first movement. It is based on the quiet development of a rhythm rather than a melody, but with a modulation into E the

subject-matter becomes more defined and the mood more directly emotional. A rising octave is a prominent feature here and in the beautiful coda.

The Scherzo is of a quite original type. Three main ideas—(1) a rising passage (6-8 time, *sempre pp*), syncopated against the thud of the violoncello's pizzicato; (2) a crisp little rhythm in 2-4 time; (3) a bold march tune in which all instruments join—appear in quick succession, and are then developed in turn to a vigorous climax. A Trio on another march-like tune contrasts with this impulsive Scherzo, and there is a full repetition without any coda. The significance of the emphasis laid on the semitone (D flat C) becomes apparent in the short slow movement which introduces the Finale. The angry downward semitone of the Scherzo finds its counterpart in a hauntingly plaintive upward one which pervades all this passage. At the end of it the bass of the piano ruminates on the D flat C, while the strings still reiterate the upward semitone and hint at the coming theme of the *Allegro*.

Ex. 10.

Strgs.

Pfte.

This begins *tranquillo* with what seems like a gentle rondo melody given out on the violoncello. But the movement evolves on far more spacious lines than those of the traditional rondo form. After this melody has been built up to a vigorous climax it is succeeded by a second which, though begun *espressivo* on the strings, is found capable of a no less strenuous treatment. Both are recapitulated with further expansions, and then with a change of key to C sharp minor, and of time to 6-8, a long coda of surpassing energy is begun in which both themes are involved. Just before the end there is a diminuendo and ritenuto in which the impulse seems to be waning. It does so only to take breath, as it were, for the final outburst, in which the movement rushes forward to its inevitable and abrupt conclusion.

Sextet in G, Op. 36

Two Violins, Two Violas, Two Violoncello

*Allegro non troppo. SCHERZO, Allegro non troppo.**Poco Adagio. Poco Allegro*

In beginning with a gently swaying theme in a moderate 3-4 time, the second Sextet seems rather to repeat the mood of the first. There is an immediate difference, however, in the thematic design and in the texture. The first Sextet begins with a diatonic song-like melody; the second with a soaring phrase of two rising fifths (chords of G and E flat). This phrase seems to rise from the rippling water-line of the first viola's part, and its highest point is reflected upside down (as reflections in water are) by the first violoncello. The image of reflection in water seems appropriate to all that part of the first movement which springs directly from this subject. Its most intricate contrapuntal devices all take their places in a clear and pellucid texture, and when the theme is strictly inverted, as it is at the beginning of the development, the process is found to produce exactly the notes necessary to the harmonic progressions. While the water is never still, it is never

Ex. 11.

Vlns. I & II.

Viola.

'Cello I & II.



so far ruffled as to shiver the reflections into fragments. Only once, just before the reprise, does the tone rise to a fortissimo, and then the reflections between first violin and violoncello are more strongly outlined than ever.

The Scherzo (G minor, 2-4) is on a much larger scale than that of the Sextet in B flat and is very original in design. It starts with a tripping figure in the upper parts with pizzicato accompaniment of a whimsical, not exuberant humour, and only bursts into jollity in the Trio (*Presto Giocoso*), which is developed to remarkable length. The return to the Scherzo is a return to demureness, the reverse of the classical habit which treated the Trio as a breathing space in the midst of the dance.

As in the first Sextet, the slow movement is a theme with variations, but instead of a precise and definite tune designed to impress itself on the memory, as if for subsequent reference, we have here an outline based on two rising fourths of a wavering tonality and rhythm, and harmonized with chromatic figures in which triplets jostle paired quavers. The theme, given out only by the upper instruments (the violoncello enter at the first variation), is one of faint suggestion rather than state-

ment, and although the variations are as strict in shape as was usual with Brahms, the actual contours of the theme are soon obliterated in them. The motif of the rising fourths enters closely into the texture of most of them. The variations are a triumph of subtle thematic development and end with one of singular breadth and beauty in E major.

The Finale is a return to active life, and after a few bars of preludial semiquavers announces one of Brahms's rich and satisfying melodies as its principal theme. One suspects from the first, however, that Brahms will not let the semiquaver figure remain merely preludial, and no sooner has the principal melody been fully articulated than the semiquavers begin to be woven into the scheme. They occupy an important place in the central development and take possession of the vigorous coda.

Sonata in E minor, Op. 38

Piano and Violoncello

Allegro non troppo. Allegretto quasi Menuetto.

Allegro

The Sonata for piano and violoncello in E minor is the first of Brahms's extant duet sonatas and is separated from its companion work in F by some twenty years. It has not anything like the command of the violoncello's rhetoric which the later work displays. Its two chief uses of the instrument are for the expression of a broad lyrical melody and as a ruminating bass to episodes in which the piano takes the lead. The former appears at once in the principal theme of the *Allegro*, a tune which, beginning on the fourth string, mounts to the tenor register. The essential feature of that tune is in the second bar, the rise and fall of the semitone

(B, C, B.). Practically all the development of the idea dwells on that feature in one way or another. A point at which Brahms contrasts the semitone directly with the whole tone is prominent, and is one of the very few passages where his idiom seems to approach that of César Franck. The second theme, with its rhythmic arpeggio tossed combatively to and fro between the instruments, rebels against the dark-toned suavity of the first theme and its tributaries, but the dark-toned suavity prevails. The coda, in the warm major key, gradually receding into the distance, is exceptionally beautiful even among Brahms's quiet endings. After it a slow movement could scarcely come. The *quasi menuetto*, which has the prim daintiness of the real eighteenth-century minuet before the symphonists began to hurry it into a scherzo time, is the ideal successor to the romantic first movement. The Trio with its hesitant beginning, as though thinking what next to do with the four notes of the minuet theme, is one of Brahms's most delicate inspirations. It does not take him long to think, and what he does is to discard the primness and let the little motif expand naturally into long, fluent phrases decorated by a type of scoring for the piano which is familiar in his works, but which comes here with delicious freshness.

Clara Schumann once accused Brahms of being ashamed of appearing too amiable, and the polished manners of the minuet seem to produce a brusque reaction in the Finale of this sonata. Its two strong accents followed by a vigorous fugue-subject bear a certain likeness to the Finale of the Quintet in F (Op. 88), but the theme is more angular and the workmanship less subtle. Moreover, a violoncello and a piano are not the ideal medium for a fugal texture that five

stringed instruments provide. The movement used to be considered one of Brahms's failures for much the same reason that it was fashionable to condemn the orchestration of his symphonies, that is, because players had not learnt to find the right balance of parts. That done, its counterpoint all comes out with an incisive brilliance. It is worth noting, because it does not seem to have been generally noticed, that the fugue subject itself is an elaboration in triplet quavers of the tune of the first movement, starting through the tonic chord and reaching the minor sixth of the scale. Brahms may or may not have been conscious of this identity, but he certainly intended to escape from the brooding mood of the first movement into one of keen physical activity, and has certainly succeeded.

Ex. 12.

(a)



(b)

*Trio in E flat, Op. 40*

Piano, Violin, Horn

*Andante. SCHERZO, Allegro. Adagio mesto. FINALE,
Allegro con brio*

The horn was one of the several instruments by which Brahms's father had picked up a precarious living as

a bandsman in Hamburg. There seems to be no record of Brahms himself ever having played it, or, indeed, any instrument other than the piano and the organ, though it would seem probable that he made some youthful experiments on his father's instruments and that his peculiar sympathy for the proclivities of the natural horn was more or less inherited. But it was during the years when, as court pianist at Detmold, Brahms played through a large repertory of chamber music with his colleagues of the court orchestra, that, in playing Beethoven's Horn Sonata and other works with August Cordes, he learnt to realize the character of the horn as a chamber music instrument. This Trio uses to the full every resource of the natural instrument without exceeding any, and every one of its ideas is stamped with the character of the instrument's tone production based on the series of overtones with closed notes lying near the open ones. It is the supreme instance in music of accepted limitations contributing to produce a masterpiece of art.

This is the only first movement in Brahms's twenty-four works of chamber music which does not bear either *Allegro* or *Vivace* at the beginning as an indication of tempo. It is also the only first movement not developed into a sonata form. It alternates two lyrical episodes, the second, *poco più animato* (9-8 time), more emotional than the reflective melody of the first (2-4 time). Through most of the movement the violin's music is, as it were, scaled down to the expressive capacity of the horn. In the stirring Scherzo and Trio the horn has to develop a greater agility, and Brahms's love of bold modulations is not cramped by the horn's limitations. A central episode in B major makes striking contrast with the prevailing tonality of E \flat . For the Trio, *molto*

meno Allegro, in A \flat minor, one of Brahms's broadly swinging tunes, he adopts the unusual practice of writing the horn part with a key-signature of four flats. For the following movement in E \flat minor the horn is given a key-signature of three flats.

The dirge-like motif (4 bars) which begins the *Adagio mesto* is reserved for the piano and punctuates the stanzas of the profoundly felt duet between violin and horn. This duet is based mainly on two figures, one beginning with a dropping diminished fourth, the other with a rising fifth. It is through the development of the second by violin and horn, supported by a murmuring tremolando of semiquavers on the piano, that the emotional middle section is evolved.

The Finale, in a fully developed sonata form, throws aside the plaintive qualities of the horn's tone. Nevertheless the lively tune from which it springs, though led off by the violin, is essentially a horn tune of the hunting-call type, and the chase, though including one or two episodes of a reflective kind, is pursued to a brilliant climax.

Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. I

Strings

*Allegro. ROMANZE, Poco Adagio. Allegretto molto
moderato e comodo. Allegro*

The first String Quartet and the first Symphony have more in common than the key of C minor. The prevailing feeling of both first movements is one of a striving energy. The fall of the diminished seventh in the first phrase of the Quartet has its counterpart in the Symphony, and in both Brahms so concentrates on 'first

subject' material that the 'second subject' becomes a mere corollary. The Quartet and the Symphony also share a technical device not usual with Brahms, that of carrying over suggestions of themes (they are scarcely more than suggestions) from one movement to another. Liszt's habit of thematic metamorphosis never appealed to Brahms, who knew that an argument is not necessarily advanced in consistency by the implied phrase, 'As I said before'. The end of a movement was normally all he had to say in regard to its ideas, and a new movement brought completely fresh ones. But sometimes he would allow himself a *Rückblick*, as he had in the F minor piano sonata, though without labelling it, as he did in that case.

In the Quartet one does not suspect that the gentle opening motif of the 'Romanze' has anything to do with the strenuous upward phrase which dominates the first movement. But when both have been thrown into the background by the plaintive *Allegretto*, both are emphatically recalled in the strident unison which introduces the Finale.

After the first mounting phrase with its burning crescendo and its sudden break off, leaving the viola holding its horn-like octave, there emerges a second idea more polyphonic and more truly quartet-like in texture. It is so distinctive that one is surprised to find later how little influence it exerts on the general course of the movement. Its function here, and when it reappears in the reprise, is to suggest a reflective and ruminating mood as a background to the strenuousness of the movement's progress. After a second upward surge of the principal theme the reflective idea seems on the verge of returning, though in detached crotchetts off the accent. It is dispelled by an agitated quaver

figure which, combined with the dotted-note rhythms derived from the first theme, contributes to the building up of a forceful and highly organized movement.

The Romanze brings relaxation, and its opening motif unfolds into a long, serene melody. A likeness to a prominent motif in *The Ring* has been noted, but, as in the case of the A major sonata, the likeness is only in a few notes, a common figure of speech in which neither Brahms nor Wagner can claim copyright. An episode in broken triplet quavers first contrasts with the serenity of the chief melody and later is fused into it by means of a decorative first violin part.

The direction 'semplice' at the head of the *Allegretto* is one which must not be ignored. The paired semi-quavers of the theme, with the viola's counter-subject from which much springs, are the more eloquent the less self-conscious they are made to sound. It and the Trio, with its wavering accompaniment on the two unison A's of the second violin, pass in a breath.

The opening of the Finale is a recall to the active life of the first movement, but it is a more genial and exuberant life which flows from its themes and their handling. The initial motif is mollified, *poco tranquillo*, into a second subject, so that in one form or another it dominates the whole movement, which culminates in an energetic *stringendo* and a direct cadence.

Ex. 13.

(a)

1st movement.

Allegro.

(b)

Romance.

Poco adagio.



(c)

Finale. Allegro.



(d)

poco tranquillo.



Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2

For Strings

*Allegro non troppo. Andante moderato. Quasi
Minuetto moderato—Allegretto vivace. FINALE,
Allegro non assai*

The Quartet in A minor bears much the same relation to the Quartet in C minor that the second Symphony bears to the first. After the first had been achieved with effort the second flowed spontaneously. Kalbeck explains that the four opening minims (A.F.A.E.) result from the combined initials of mottoes which associated

Brahms and Joachim. No doubt he is correct in this; Brahms never wrote a phrase for the violin without thinking of Joachim, though this Quartet is actually dedicated not to Joachim, but to Brahms's friend, Theodor Billroth. But the mottoes matter little to us now. What is of more importance to observe is, what Kalbeck proceeds to point out, that the four minims provide the first impulse in a melody which, without repeating the motto, continues its wide sweep with constantly changing rhythmic figures through twenty bars. The whole first movement gains spaciousness by the method. The 'second subject', though a more clearly defined tune than the first, is also one of long-drawn phrases; undulating crotchet triplets on the viola are the characteristic accompaniment to both melodies and help to produce a texture of singular buoyancy. The marks of expression are moderate. There is never a fortissimo climax throughout the whole movement; a codetta figure in paired quavers on which the instruments concentrate, leaving for the moment their more usual manner of intertwined rhythms, is the strongest point of emphasis. The proportions of the several sections of the movement are unusual. The central development is short and not very eventful; after a full recapitulation there is a long and richly expressive coda.

Brahms so frequently grouped the several movements of his sonata-form works in some scheme of key contrasts that his refusal here of that resource is worth noting. See below what is said of these key relationships in connexion with the Piano Quartet in C minor. The first movement depends very little on modulation, and all four movements are in the key of A, minor or major. The slow movement (A major) is developed from a

restrained and exquisitely balanced melody, not, as so often, of the arpeggio kind, but mounting in its first phrase step by step through only four degrees of the scale. In sharp contrast with this is the dramatic middle section, in which the violin and violoncello announce the declamatory duet accompanied by an agitated tremolando on the inner instruments. When this subsides the principal melody returns with an added serenity in F on its way back to the principal key.

The third movement is an alternation of a slow and dignified minuet measure (A minor) with a light and fairy-like Scherzo (A major, 2-4 time). Rhythmical contrasts are equally a prime source of interest in the Finale. This is a rondo with an angular syncopated tune of 3-bar phrases, gipsy-wise, and more gracious episodes lying between the recurrences of the main theme (compare the Finale of the Piano Quartet in A). The gradual smoothing out of the syncopated rhythm before the final vivace is a stroke of genius, which heightens immensely the brilliance of the ending.

Quartet in C minor, Op. 60

Piano, Violin, Viola, Violoncello

Allegro non troppo. SCHERZO, Allegro. Andante.
FINALE, Allegro comodo

It seems clear that this work as we have it has not much in common with that which Brahms began to write together with the two other Piano Quartets, Opp. 25 and 26. One would guess the Scherzo to be early work, since it is akin in feeling to the piano scherzos and to the Sonaten-Satz which has been discussed at the head of this series, though obviously more mature in

workmanship. Indeed its rhythm and the rise of the semitone in the piano's first announcement directly recalls the Sonaten-Satz. Otherwise the whole moulding seems to belong to a time in which the composer had outgrown that exuberance of melodic ideas which is so attractive a feature of the two earlier piano quartets.

The principal theme, given out in long, sinuous phrases on the strings, is never heard again in that form, but it impresses itself on the whole first movement. The pairs of crotchets, its opening motif, which begin the work in an oppressive atmosphere of gloom, become rebellious as staccato forte chords on the piano. Out of the gloom a mood of restless struggle emerges, with semiquaver passages on the strings punctuated by strong chord passages on the piano. This mood is not, however, long maintained; a *tranquillo* leads into a more reposeful melody of the 'second subject'. This contains a number of diverse elements, but they are structurally bound together by the fact that each 8-bar phrase is actually a variation on the first lyrical one, which the piano announces alone. At the end of five of these variants the haunting pairs of crotchets begin to reappear and recreate the mood of the opening. A central passage of development in B major brings strings and piano together in a bold fortissimo, and the texture is, on the whole, simpler than in the earlier quartets. The recapitulation is also a further development of these ideas, since no one of them appears in its original form. A most striking passage is the return of the 'second subject', unexpectedly in G major. Here the lyrical tune, now played by the viola, is varied by quite other devices than those of its first appearances. The coda, with its rich arpeggios on the piano and the intense

fervour with which the paired crotchet motif is handled by the strings, makes the ending of this movement one of the most original of all Brahms's conceptions.

The Scherzo, effective though it is, can hardly be said to be commensurate with the scale of the first movement. But though it suggests Brahms's early manner it does not preserve the conventional binary forms with repeats of the classical scherzo and trio; its activity gallops on unceasingly, and a middle section in the same time, but having a smoother gait, never checks its progress.

If the Scherzo is typical rather than individual the *Andante* makes amends. In an age when the short characteristic motif was increasingly taking the place of more highly organized melodies in instrumental music, Brahms's power of sustaining thought through long spaces such as this 16-bar tune for violoncello solo was the thing which marked him most decisively apart from the crowd. A new design appears in every work, even though the general form (A.B.A. and coda) is that which served him so well in his later intermezzi for piano. The middle section introduces a syncopated rhythm; this, combined with suggestions from the principal melody, evolve a complex texture of which Ex. 14 is typical. At the return, the principal tune, played in octaves by the piano and accompanied by the pizzicati of the strings, produces a colour scheme quite distinct from that of the first presentation by the violoncello.

In the Finale Brahms begins with the presentation of three very distinct ideas: (1) a duet for violin and piano which bears an unmistakable resemblance to the Finale of the Violin Sonata in G; (2) a sweeping arpeggio tune on the strings, with a sextuplet rhythm

against it on the piano; and (3) a four-line 'Choral' in plain harmonies on the strings.

Ex. 14.

Violin.

Viola.

'Cello.

Piano.

These diverse elements are subtly woven together in a development marked *tranquillo e sempre pianissimo*, from which a long crescendo leads to a return of the

first, played in octaves by all the strings. All are recapitulated and summed up in a masterly coda.

Brahms's key relationships are always worth noting, because always a part of his expressive purpose. Sometimes he insists on strong key contrasts between the several movements. That between F major and F sharp major in the Violoncello Sonata, Op. 99, is among the most forcible. On the other hand, sometimes, as in the Quartet for Strings in A minor, he preserves a single tonic throughout the four movements. His four sonata-form works in C minor are this quartet, the first String Quartet, the first Symphony, and the Trio for Piano and Strings, Op. 101. In the last named all four movements are in C (minor or major). Here he chooses the key of E major for his slow movement and in the String Quartet that of A flat major. In the symphony he uses both these keys for slow movement and allegretto respectively.

Quartet in B flat major, Op. 67

For Strings

Vivace. Andante. Agitato (Allegretto non troppo).

Poco Allegretto con variazioni

In this delightful work Brahms seems determined to live down his reputation for serious-mindedness. The little hunting-call motif in 6-8 time, which the two inner instruments give out in thirds, belongs to the common figures of speech of classical music and is of the kind which any one of Brahms's romantic contemporaries would have dismissed as unworthy of them. All the instruments pick it up as chorus to the chanters and echo the suggestions of the second violin and viola in frank two-bar phrases. Its naïve gaiety

becomes infectious; very soon it is decorated with rapid scale passages, and the two-bar phrases expand into longer ones. But Brahms refuses to be tempted to pursue his initial theme too rigorously and the second subject, in 2-4 time, makes an almost jaunty contrast with what has gone before. These two rhythms alternate, but never combine, in the central development, which is as clearly divided into two sections as are the exposition and recapitulation. There is also introduced here a passage, *sotto voce*, of long phrases rising and falling in thirds, which has no relevance to any of the thematic material of the exposition, but is like a snatch of plaintive song mingling with the revels. It adds much to the simple and spontaneous character of the whole movement, and having begun and ended the development section, it disappears, never to return.

The first violin takes on itself the long, sweeping melody of the *Andante* in F major, the others accompanying and occasionally echoing its initiative. It is a little reminiscent of Mendelssohn, and Brahms would

Ex. 15.

The musical score consists of three staves of music for string instruments. The top staff is for the violin, the middle for the cello, and the bottom for the bassoon. The music is in common time, with a key signature of one flat. The first measure shows the violin playing eighth-note patterns, dynamic 'p'. The second measure shows the cello playing eighth-note patterns, dynamic 'r'. The third measure shows the bassoon playing eighth-note patterns, dynamic 'r'. A repeat sign is present at the beginning of the third measure, indicating a repeat of the first two measures.

not have considered himself insulted by the suggestion. A more sharply cut rhythm disturbs its serenity and leads to an elaborate middle section which includes the effect, unusual in Brahms, of expanding a melismatic passage of common time into a corresponding one of 5-4 time (Ex. 15).

The *Agitato* is a solo for the viola; the other instruments are muted. The viola's tune (D minor) is one of those graceful waltz rhythms of the kind which reminds us of the piano waltzes (Op. 39), of the *Liebeslieder*, and a little of the *Allegretto* of the third symphony. The Trio (in A minor) preserves the same character along with the prominence of the viola, and after the complete repetition of the *Agitato* there is a delicate pianissimo coda in the major key.

The theme for variation is one of conscious demureness, a neat little binary movement with both its short sections (4 bars and 6 bars) repeated, and an unexpected modulation at the beginning of the second section. After three variations have embroidered its shapeliness with figurations in its own key (B flat major), three more carry the process further in the keys of B flat minor, D flat major, and G flat. A seventh variation returns abruptly to the principal key and introduces the hunting-call tune of the first movement as a feature of two further variations (B flat major and minor) and a coda. At the end of the coda the tunes of both movements are combined in an artfully artless manner, and then this most humoursome of all Brahms's chamber works is abruptly brought to an end.

Sonata in G. Op. 78

Piano and Violin

*Vivace ma non troppo. Adagio. Allegro molto
moderato*

In the set of songs published as Opus 59 are two, *Regenlied* and *Nachklang*, a pair of poems by Klaus Groth, on one musical theme designed to create the picture of the falling rain which is the background of the poet's idea. Brahms published about 200 songs of his own (exclusive of innumerable folk-song arrangements), but nowhere else did he quote one of his own song melodies in an instrumental composition. Why these songs should have haunted him years after when he took in hand what was to be his first extant sonata for piano and violin it is impossible to say; but it is important to note that they were in his mind from the beginning and were not merely called in to supply a theme for the Finale. This sonata is one of the rather few instances in which Brahms carried his themes on from one movement to another. We have seen that he did it in the String Quartet in C minor, and that he returned to his first theme at the end of the String Quartet in B flat just described. The *Regenlied*, which declares itself in the Finale, gives a hint of its presence in the first drooping phrase uttered by the violin in the first movement against the simple chords of the piano. That phrase appears note for note, though in slow time and in the minor key, in the piano's introduction to *Regenlied*. It leads in the sonata to a movement glowing with a warm lyrical feeling produced by the *cantabile* style of the violin music. This is as far removed from the plaintive song as anything could be.

The *Adagio* in E flat, one of the loveliest of Brahms's more emotional movements, also makes its contribution to the ultimate issue of the Finale, for its theme returns at the height of the development of the *Regenlied*, not as an interpolation but as an integral part of the last *Allegro*. The confluence of the two themes is a unique inspiration.

Trio in C major, Op. 87

Pianoforte, Violin, and Violoncello

Allegro. Andante con moto. SCHERZO, Presto.

FINALE, Allegro giocoso

The opening of this fine work is not immediately arresting, like that of the Trio in C minor. A plain phrase in unison on the strings, classical in pattern, and neither striking an attitude nor proclaiming a mood, is developed immediately through what seems to be its least conspicuous feature, the rising octave. It gathers strength, and leads to one of Brahms's longest and most varied 'second subject' sections, in which idea follows idea with the utmost freedom. A distinctive dotted-note figure produces a strenuous development, at the height of which a complete change of feeling is produced by a version of the first theme in longer notes begun on the violoncello (in D flat) and accompanied on the piano with soft arpeggios. A quickening of the time occurs here, and the whole passage, in which presently the violin joins, brings a more lyrical feeling which has its counterpart again in the *animato* of the coda.

The *Andante* in A minor is a set of five variations on a theme of strongly marked but simple character. The tune is played by the two strings (two octaves apart),

and against it the piano sets a syncopated accompaniment in chords, an idea which gets a considerable development in the fourth variation, in the major key. This set of variations may be compared with that of the Sextet in B flat, but here the variations remain more closely in touch with the outline of the tune. Indeed, it is only in the fourth, where the key is major and the time changes to 6-8, that the precision of the theme is relaxed in favour of a more romantic feeling.

The muttering Scherzo (C minor), light arpeggios on the piano running through the repeated notes on the strings, is one of the most original of Brahms's Scherzos, and not less so because the form, with Trio in the major key, full repetition and short coda, is perfectly normal. In only one passage of the Scherzo, the central modulation to the remote key of C sharp minor, does a burning crescendo lead to a forte climax. Elsewhere, the tone is always suppressed by the direction *pp* *sempre*. The frank and swinging tune of the Trio is in striking contrast to this suppression.

Ex. 16.

Vln.

Violin (Vln.)

Cello ('Cello)

Piano (Pfte.)

8va

pp legg.

The jovial mood of the Finale is the outcome of two motifs which come together at the outset, a tune with a prominent augmented fourth in it on the strings, and a figure of four quavers on the piano. These are almost constantly present, and are bandied about between the instruments. A particularly delightful development from them is that in which the strings take over the quaver figure and the piano embroiders a variation in triplets around the tune (Ex. 16).

Quintet in F major, Op. 88

Two Violins, Two Violas, and Violoncello

Allegro non troppo ma con brio. Grave ed appassionato: Allegretto vivace: Tempo I: Presto: Tempo I. Allegro energico

The least often played of all Brahms's chamber works, this quintet shows at once the ripeness of the composer's style. The definiteness of the initial tune, displayed in alternate phrases by the two violins, makes one ask how such an idea can be rendered sufficiently pliable for the purposes of sonata form. Compare the opening theme of the Fourth Symphony. The passage after the first statement supplies such an answer as only Brahms can give, and by the time the second main tune in A major sails in on the first viola, the first has lost its square-cut shape and appetite has been whetted for the supple developments to come. It is a movement of unflagging interest.

The key system is studiously simple. The contrast of F major and A major (with attendant sharp keys) is the principal event of the modulatory kind in a movement of intricate rhythmic design. When the sharp keys give way to the principal one in the course of the

development, a persistent pedal C is maintained on the violoncello and only released by the burning crescendo to an emphatic unison on D flat which prepares the way for the return (*sempre forte*) of the principal theme. This is the point of highest tension and is followed by a coda in which the tempo is slackened and energy relaxed in a passage of quiet beauty. The energy is revived momentarily in the three bars of final cadence.

The central movement is a magnificent example of that type, Brahms's most conspicuous innovation in form, which combines slow movement and Scherzo. Brahms makes amends for a first movement in which design takes precedence of expression by beginning the slow movement with a theme on the violoncello which immediately attracts the ear to itself. Though in C sharp minor, this theme begins on a major harmony, and its scale combines major and minor characteristics.

Ex. 17.

'Cello.

The whole *Grave* is rich in expressive figures, amongst which the shakes, followed by upward rushing arpeggios on the violoncello against descending quavers, in the upper parts are specially eloquent. The *Allegretto* (6-8 time) and *Presto* (4-4), the latter a variation of the former, are both in A major. They supply the Scherzo element of contrast. Each return to the *Grave* theme is made with new enrichments of its emotional

content. Again we can find an analogy between this work and the Fourth Symphony, for, as in the slow movement of the latter, there is here a contest of keys. On its last appearance the *Grave* gives way to the key of the two Scherzo interludes; in its coda, however, it seems to be settling down to its own C sharp cadence when at the last moment it is diverted, and the movement ends softly on a chord of A major. Brahms very rarely ends a movement out of its principal key. When he does (here and in the slow movement of the early piano sonata in F minor) its effect is magical.

The spell is broken by two staccato chords, and the first viola gives out a fugue subject in rapid quavers. It induces a fugal exposition of four parts, since the second viola and violoncello play the fourth entry in octaves. The Finale is a movement of that type of which Mozart was the first master, of fugal texture combined with a sonata plan. Actually the second subject appears as a counter-subject of a more vocal kind above the running quavers of the fugue. Its triplet figure presently leads to a change of the first subject into a like measure. Brahms writes *dolce semplice* against the pianissimo passage where this device occurs, but neither sweetness nor simplicity are the leading characteristics of this keen-edged and mentally alert movement.

Sonata in F major, Op. 99

Pianoforte and Violoncello

Allegro vivace. Adagio affettuoso. Allegro passionato. Allegro molto

This is the most exuberant of Brahms's seven duet sonatas. It, with the Violin Sonata in A and the Trio

in C minor, is the product of the summer at Thun; together they make 1886 a vintage year in Brahms's Chamber Music.

The first *Allegro* starts at the flood-tide of energy, the violoncello's exclamations striking across the rustling tremolandi of the piano. The second theme given out by the piano is in an equally gallant mood, though it has been reached by a gradual ebb of energy and diminution of tone. Brahms so frequently follows a strong opening with a more reflective second subject that the equality of these companions is the more remarkable. Throughout the movement each episode brings a new impulsion of the exuberant spirit, and each time the first subject returns it is with a *sforzando* that the tremolandi are released. The restart of this idea in F sharp minor, from which the development proceeds, is particularly striking, and prepares the way for the unusual juxtaposition of keys produced by the first and second movements.

The *Adagio* is in F sharp major, with a middle section in F minor. The strongly marked pizzicato figure on the violoncello dictates the outline of the principal theme and leads to a movement of great richness in which the emotion is held in check by a stately elegiac rhythm. The *Allegro passionato* (F minor) is a Scherzo of the wistful kind (compare the theme of the Finale of the third symphony) in which the sinuous line of the principal theme is broken by moments of turbulent energy. In the calmer trio (F major) another central modulation to F sharp is significant in view of what has gone before. The violoncello's stalwart tune brings a more reposeful mood to the Finale, and ends the sonata on a note of triumphant achievement.

Sonata in A major, Op. 100

Piano and Violin

Allegro amabile. Andante tranquillo—vivace. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

This sonata is in sharp contrast with the work immediately preceding it. It is not profound; it is technically one of the simplest of Brahms's chamber works, and its beauty is that of the qualifying adjectives bestowed on the titles of its several movements, amiable, tranquil, and gracious. It has been called the weakest of Brahms's duet sonatas, but that is only a reproach among those who expect a strong man to be for ever inviting his friends to feel his biceps.

What is peculiar about this sonata is its unsullied happiness, the absence of any of that suggestion of pensive regret which tempers the serenity of many of Brahms's later works.

The first movement develops its lyrical theme at leisure, combining with it others which do not so much contrast with it as reinforce its mood. The central movement is of the dual type, the *Andante* and *Vivace* - having a point of contact in the prevalence of the rising fourth in both melodies. Peculiarly happy is the contrast between the sedate movement of semi-quavers in the *Andante* and the hopping gait of the *Vivace*.

The rich tune on the violin's fourth string brings a more purposeful mood to the Finale. The two-in-a-bar time-signature is apt to be a little misleading, and the two beats cannot be quick ones. Brahms seems to have been aware of the difficulty when he qualified his direction with the words *quasi andante*. The move-

ment is a rondo in which each recurrence of the melody leads to a fresh development of untrammelled spontaneity.

Trio in C minor, Op. 101

Piano, Violin, and Violoncello

Allegro energico. Presto non assai. Andante grazioso. Allegro molto

The piano opens with a bold declamatory phrase, and the strings seizing on its salient triplet figure begin to expand its argument in ever-widening arpeggios. The character of the movement as a whole is proclaimed in these heroic triplets punctuated by the rhetorical semiquaver passages of the piano. An almost swaggering flourish heralds an exultant theme in which for a few bars strings and piano are united in a single dotted-note rhythm. In this movement Brahms is insistent that his tunes shall stand right in the foreground; when the broad second subject arrives it is played by the strings in octaves, and even when the method of presentation becomes more contrapuntal, the counterpoint is of the most directly expressive kind.

The Trio contrasts with the String Quintet in F in the way the problem of recapitulation is solved. Here there is no long pedal point leading up to an emphatic return of the opening theme. In point of fact, that theme never does proclaim its identity until very near the end of the coda. The hearer is never told that the central development has been completed and that the recapitulation is about to begin. He finds that this has happened when the second subject comes in once more in C major. It is such diverse treatments as these which show Brahms as the master of form and never mastered by it.

The first stanza of the *Presto non assai* is a song for the piano accompanied by muted strings, the middle one is mainly a dialogue for the strings, and in the third they steal the piano's tune and make a duet of it, while the piano adds an arpeggio accompaniment. It is a thing of gossamer delicacy perfected by the 'dying fall' of the coda.

Brahms's tunes generally fall naturally into either duple or triple-time measures. That of the *Andante grazioso* is an instance to the contrary. Its leading motif of three bars is a septuple time which divides into 3-4, 2-4, 2-4; its contrasting theme is a quintuple time divided 9-8, 6-8, and these measures are used, though not always quite regularly, throughout the movement until the short coda in 9-8 time. It is one of the most purely tuneful movements in the whole of Brahms's chamber music, and completely free from that sense of strain which the use of complex time measures frequently produces. The reason is that the tune was invented first and the notation settled afterwards. Brahms never composed to bar-lines.

The Finale returns from these entrancing interludes to the impulsive energy of the first movement, but not with the bold declamatory opening. The violin starts a swinging tune which gradually gathers impetus as the other instruments collaborate in it. Its rhythms are never out of sight for long during the whole movement, though they sometimes sink to a murmur and at other times are borne forward on a rich tide of sound. The development is concise, and after a regular recapitulation a coda of some length begins with the tune in a modified shape, and with an exciting *stringendo* brings the work to an end in the exultant mood from which it started.

Sonata in D minor, Op. 108

Violin and Piano

Allegro. Adagio. Un poco presto e con sentimento.
Presto Agitato

Few of Brahms's dedications are of such interest as this one, 'to his friend, Hans von Bülow', which commemorates, and makes an ample return for, the enthusiastic support which that great artist gave both as pianist and conductor to the later phases of Brahms's work. This sonata is beyond question the greatest of the three for violin and piano in the depth of its feeling and the great range of expression covered by its four movements. It was written at Thun in the summer of 1888, and was first played in Vienna in the following spring by Brahms and Joachim.

The first motif, with the rising fourth on the violin accompanied by the syncopated octaves on the piano, *sotto voce*, tells us that the movement is to be one on a grand scale, a thing very different from the charming lyricism of the two earlier violin sonatas. The long, subdued development on a pedal point is unique in Brahms's chamber music, but, as Mr. Fuller Maitland reminds us, it recalls passages of similarly serious feeling in the *Requiem*.

The *Adagio* is a rich melody in D major woven without seam, that is to say, there is no central section of direct contrast as in most of Brahms's movements of the kind. There follows a tiny scherzo-like movement of a moth's-wing delicacy, from which any attempt to realize consciously the direction *con sentimento* might brush the bloom away.

After these two strikingly contrasted interludes (the

last in F sharp minor) Brahms plunges on to the dominant of his principal key, to begin a Finale of tremendous power. It has the same magnificence of proportion which belongs to the first *Allegro*, but it is carried forward more impulsively, and a great march-like tune presently appears and, mingling with the agitated rhythms of the first subject, contributes its weight to a triumphant peroration.

Quintet in G, Op. III

Two Violins, Two Violas, Violoncello

Allegro non troppo, ma con brio. Adagio. Un poco Allegretto. Vivace ma non troppo presto

This magnificent work is the grand climax of Brahms's chamber music for strings. The direction *non troppo* given to its two quick movements, as so often elsewhere, is a reminder of Brahms's constant fear lest his vigorous rhythms should evaporate in a hurried tempo. The first movement is one of tremendous verve, but is not to be taken too fast. Nor must the *forte* of the upper strings be interpreted literally if the violoncello is to dominate the situation as it is intended to do. Its theme vaults through three octaves and occupies fourteen long bars of 9-8 time, no mere germinal motif to find its fulfilment later, but a bold rhetorical statement which declares itself at once. Later, at the first modulation to the dominant, themes in simpler melodic outlines occur; two in fact, one propounded by the first viola, the other by the second violin. Presumably both must be described as 'second subject'; one is marked *espressivo* and the other *dolce*, but the pulsing energy of the movement is never

relaxed. The violoncello's theme stimulates the two powerful crescendos of the development. A closely woven texture with rapid modulation induces a good deal of harmonic complexity here, but this is all cleared away by a regular recapitulation of all the subject-matter and a frank G major coda of the utmost brightness.

The theme of the *Adagio* in D minor, announced by the first viola, has a haunting likeness to that in Beethoven's Rasoumovsky Quartet in F. So much has been said, rightly or wrongly, of Brahms as the inheritor of Beethoven's tradition that the dissimilarity of their thematic material in general is overlooked. This and possibly the opening of the Trio in C, Op. 87, are the only salient themes in the whole of Brahms's chamber music which if heard without their context might conceivably be mistaken for Beethoven. It is accompanied by a pizzicato bass during four bars, and in the first fourteen bars (that is to say, before the initial tune is taken up by the first violin) are contained hints of practically all the rhythmical figures which are to play a part in the highly concentrated design. Brahms's favourite A B A formula is discarded, and a single mood of deep and serious emotion reaches a poignant climax and recedes from it to a quiet ending in which the Beethoven-like motif is dwelt on.

Ex. 18.



The *Allegretto* in G minor and major relieves the tension. It is very simple in form, two binary movements with a repetition of the first and a delicate coda in the major key. It is among the most gracious examples of a type very much Brahms's own.

The chief theme of the final rondo is begun by the lower instruments in B minor, though the movement is, naturally, in G, and the juxtaposition of the two keys adds point to the several returns of the theme. Its cumulative vivacity has more than a hint of the 'Hungarian' dance type of melody, and the three-note chords on one instrument or another (sometimes *pizzicato*) emphasize accents and add to the verve of a movement full of strong melodic invention which ends in the highest of spirits.

The Quintet for strings in G, the product of the summer of 1890 spent at Ischl, seemed to Brahms himself to have completed his output of concerted chamber music. He remarked that hitherto things had always come easily to him and no longer did so, a remark, on the face of it, not quite literally true, considering the long period of incubation which some of his greater achievements had required. But Brahms always drew a clear mental distinction between the idea of a work and its execution. The ideas came to him spontaneously and complete; the realization might be a long and arduous process. After the Quintet in G he found himself for the first time without any compelling idea awaiting execution. A visit to Meiningen in the spring, when the clarinettist, Richard Mühlfeld, played to him in private, gave him the new impulse he required.

The clarinet, which previously had been merely a colour on his orchestral palette, became for him a distinct musical personality like the violoncello and the

horn, and his next summer holiday at Ischl was occupied with the composition of this Trio and its more famous companion, the Clarinet Quintet.

Trio in A minor, Op. 114

Piano, Clarinet, and Violoncello

Allegro. Adagio. Andantino grazioso. Allegro

The Trio has had to suffer a good deal of adverse criticism of its details, even from those who are most disposed to meet Brahms half-way with their sympathy, but most of it amounts to little more than a preference for the Quintet, and the realization that some of the Trio has been said before by Brahms in other ways. It opens with a singularly beautiful melody propounded by the violoncello and expanded by the clarinet, rising by arpeggio and then dropping through the natural form of the minor scale. As usual with Brahms, each of the three instruments has its own way of dealing with

Ex. 19. Clar. (as sounded).

Ex. 19 cont.

this and the kindred ideas which contribute to the first movement in sonata form. A case like this, where the instruments provide three distinct colours, gives a striking instance of Brahms's absolute refusal of anything like 'filling up' harmonies in chamber music. The parts are never allowed to congeal into masses of tone, but throughout engage one another in conversa-

tion, as witness the handling of the initial arpeggio. (Ex. 19.)

The slow movement in D major brings a greater warmth of feeling, and its rich texture throws into strong contrast the almost excessive simplicity of the theme of the *Andantino grazioso*. This latter (A major) is in the form of minuet and trio, but without anything like a full repetition of the minuet, only a short coda in which the theme is recalled. The gay theme of the Finale, in which the characteristics of 6-8 and 2-4 times are played off against one another, seems of the kind which ought to be fruitful in development, but is in fact treated with the utmost conciseness. Brahms was like Beethoven in a growth of precision as years advanced and the dislike of redundancy. This movement goes straight to its point, makes it decisively, and ends in a plain emphatic cadence.

Quintet in B minor, Op. 115

Clarinet, Two Violins, Viola, Violoncello

Allegro. Adagio. Andantino—Presto non assai, ma con sentimento. Con moto

The Clarinet Quintet, admittedly the most eloquent of Brahms's four works for clarinet, is in a curiously subdued mood. Like the Third Symphony every one of its four movements ends softly, but when the Third Symphony was produced that significant fact seemed to pass almost unnoticed by those who spoke of it as Brahms's *Eroica*. It cannot escape attention in the case of the Clarinet Quintet, in which the diminuendo seems inevitable from the first. Every one of its principal themes droops from a high note; so constant is this

outline that it is possible to imagine that all are conscious variants of one idea, and when the actual melody of the first movement comes back as a coda to the variations which form the Finale, it hardly seems to be, as in the string quartet in B flat, a return to an idea long left behind, but merely the last word on one which has been present to the mind throughout.

Four bars on the strings alone introduce that melody, and then the clarinet, rising through an arpeggio of D, makes its first contribution to it. In the course of this phrase of 10 bars the clarinet traverses a range of nearly three octaves.

Ex. 20.

Clar. (as sounded).



A stronger rhythmic life stirs in the second episode, given out by the strings staccato and forte, and prepares the way for the 'second subject' (D major), in a warmer mood of expression. Throughout this and, indeed, the whole movement, the way in which the clarinet's distinctive colour is added to the close texture of the strings is peculiarly intimate. Just before the end there is a remarkable tonal climax, reached through a crescendo of rushing scale passages (the strings tremolando),

from the height of which the first violin drops down through the swaying curves of the principal melody from the high F sharp to its low notes on the G string. The movement ends with faint echoes of that melody on the clarinet.

The strings are muted throughout the *Adagio*, so that their tone is veiled even in the most passionate climax, which occurs in the middle of the movement. At the outset, however, the clarinet's melody (to be taken up by the first violin presently) sails serenely over a misty texture of triplet quavers and syncopated rhythms murmured low down on the muted strings. The clarinet is the protagonist of the romantic middle section, a *Più lento* led into by a long sweeping phrase over the greater part of the instrument's range, recalling its first entry in the preceding movement as shown in Example 20. The *Più lento* itself (in B minor) has an elegiac theme decorated with impulsive arabesques on the clarinet, and accompanied on the strings with recollections of the crotchet movement of the principal melody. The strings are gradually moved to closer participation in the elegiac theme until the passionate climax already alluded to is reached, and produces an intensity of personal expression hardly to be matched anywhere else in Brahms's slow movements. The return of the first melody in the major key and a short coda, in which the clarinet makes a quieter allusion to the arabesques, end the movement in a mood of resignation.

The third movement follows: a pensive *Andantino* (common time in D major) with a variation of its chief figure, *Presto* (2-4 time in B minor). This is not an alternation of the kind which was Brahms's earlier custom, for the *Andantino* never actually returns,

although the coda of the *Presto* recalls its melody and ends in D major. It is a very delicately poised movement, full of subtle details in which the rhythmic threads are drawn together.

A set of variations forms a peculiarly appropriate ending to the Clarinet Quintet. Like those in the first Sextet they are based on a binary theme, but only the second half is repeated, and the 'droop', which has pervaded all the thematic material of the Quintet, is equally characteristic of this theme, and of the figures derived from it in the variations.

Ex. 21. Vln.

Clar.



Sonata in F minor, Op. 120, No. 1

Clarinet and Piano

Allegro Appassionato. Andante un poco adagio.

Allegretto grazioso. Vivace

The widespread intervals of the clarinet's opening melody with dropping sevenths (used to very different ends from those of the A major Quartet, the C minor String Quartet, and the C minor Symphony, in all of which the interval is used for declamatory emphasis), give to the first movement of this sonata a pensive character which becomes tragic in the more emphatic passages of the development. The tragic feeling persists

Ex. 22.

Clar. (as sounded).



into the *Adagio*, in which the dark-toned arabesques of the clarinet are constantly in the foreground.

It is, however, completely swept away by the charming *Allegretto* which Professor Tovey calls 'the most deliciously Viennese of all Brahms's works'. The Finale, too, is in the happiest humour. The three ringing minims of the piano's opening and the rondo tune with staccato repeated notes (most unusual for Brahms and unthinkable apart from the clarinet) lead to all sorts of delightful happenings, and the texture is kept as light as possible. These two last movements counteract the notion that the last years of Brahms's artistic life were shrouded in melancholy. They are young in spirit, though no young composer could have modelled anything so flawless in its artistic economy.

Sonata in E flat, Op. 120, No. 2

Clarinet and Piano

Allegro amabile. Allegro passionato. Andante con moto—Allegro

The lyrical ease of this sonata comes as a relief from the emotional concentration of so much of Brahms's later chamber music. The song-like melody into which the clarinet launches at once is decorated with variants of its opening figure and then gives place to a second, the rising octave of which contrasts with the persistent 'droop' of the Quintet's tunes. From this simple material the whole of the first movement is evolved, the clarinet constantly holding the lead, the piano here and there contributing an echo to its melody, but more often enriching the texture with those arpeggio formations which are accustomed features of Brahms's piano technique.

There is an interesting coincidence of keys between Brahms's early Scherzo for piano (the only one published as a separate piece) and this, his last of all. Both bring together the keys of E flat minor and B major. But this Scherzo has none of what Schumann called the 'demonic nature' in the early work; its broad melody pulses forward unchecked, and its Trio in B major is a rich *sostenuto* given out first in the piano's lower octaves with full chord harmony. The Sonata ends with Brahms's last set of variations, four of which are in the *Andante* tempo of the theme in 6-8 time. The fifth, changing the time to 2-4 and the pace to *Allegro*, enables the movement to serve the double purpose in the Sonata of slow movement and Finale.

It is worth while to note here, particularly for the benefit of amateur performers, that the two Sonatas of Op. 120 are published in the Peters Edition with three parts, for clarinet in B flat, viola, and violin. The viola part is note for note that of the clarinet, and Brahms in placing the words 'oder Bratsche' on the title-page of his original edition (Simrock) sanctioned its use. But he also made the arrangement for violin and piano which has necessitated transferring some details of the clarinet music to the piano part.

Delightful as these sonatas are in any form, they lose a great deal when the clarinet part is transferred to either of the stringed instruments and especially the violin, since much of the beauty lies not only in the use of the tenor register, which the viola possesses in common with the clarinet, but in phrase-forms which are specially characteristic of the wind instrument.

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